CHAPTER XXI

PRESERVATION OF RELIGION

(1) RELIGIOUS REFORMS

CONSCIOUSLY or unconsciously, and in various ways, Jewry has struggled against the blows that have threatened its existence. The several phases through which the Jewish religion has passed in the last century, from Orthodoxy by way of Liberal to Reform Judaism, are so many attempts made in the retreat to raise new ramparts against the destructive influence of European civilization. The original front-line has been held only in a few remote territories of Eastern Europe and the Near East. Elsewhere the question turned merely on how far the retreat should go before establishing a new defensive position.

Where the Jews had adopted the language of the country, they endeavoured to retain their religion and their communal consciousness based on a common past, while trying fully to take their place in the civilization of the country. Orthodox Judaism., which entangles its followers in a network of obsolete ritual, had to undergo a reformation, and to adopt new forms better suited to modern knowledge and conditions. As early as the middle of the eighteenth century the Chassidic movement in Poland turned against the superabundance of ritual rules, and sought the essence of religion in the spiritual relationship of man to God; still,

they did not dare to brush aside the ritual laws, but, basing themselves on the Cabbala, developed the mystical side of their doctrine[1] (belief in the efficacy of prayer, and in the

[1] Even at present the Ohassidim still represent a great power in East European Jewry. Numerically they are a minority, but they are well